

Plan Review Procedures for Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems at Vehicle Service Buildings

Plumbers or other persons hired to design a private onsite waste treatment system (POWTS) --- also commonly known as septic systems --- for any commercial or industrial building should first ask the owner or operator specifically what activities would occur in the building. If you are the owner, plan ahead, design your operations and activities to minimize pollution and wastewater and avoid future costs and liability. Check out pollution prevention options on DNR's Auto Services website: <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/caer/cea/assistance/auto/>

In addition to plan reviews by the Department of Commerce for the POWTS and, if necessary, plumbing, activities, which produce an industrial wastewater discharge, will need to be reviewed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Rules have been promulgated by EPA that prohibit wastewater from any vehicle maintenance activities being discharged to a septic tank and subsurface soil absorption field. For other activities, such as parking vehicles (no maintenance) and washing the outside of vehicles, the DNR will review the situation on a case-by-case basis as described below.

Systems that Combine Industrial and Sanitary Waste

The owner or the designer should submit a letter to the DNR requesting a case-by-case evaluation of which disposal method is acceptable. The letter should include detailed information about all the activities that generate wastewater and the estimated volume of wastewater. It should also describe how any waste that may be detrimental to a septic tank and soil absorption system will be kept from the system. If the wastewater from an activity does not present a risk of groundwater pollution, the DNR may allow a discharge to a soil absorption system. A Wisconsin Pollution Discharge Elimination System (WPDES) permit may be issued if the discharge is to a subsurface system. Industrial wastewater can be mixed with sanitary waste or it can be discharged to a separate system. If it's mixed with sanitary wastewater, the plans for the system will be reviewed by Commerce (or delegated to a local government unit) with the DNR's written concurrence. You should obtain a DNR concurrence letter prior to submitting plans to Commerce. The two agencies have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) specifying this procedure.

The DNR recommends that the sanitary wastewater sewer line be kept separate from any industrial or commercial wastewater sewer line until the sewer lines are outside of the building. This will allow the option of putting in a holding tank for the non-domestic wastewater if required by DNR or if new activities, such as vehicle maintenance, occur in the building.

Systems That Contain Only Industrial Waste

Plans for industrial POWTS for wastewaters that contain no sanitary wastewater are reviewed and approved by the DNR. The design requirements for septic tanks and subsurface soil absorption systems are in Wis. Adm. Code NR 214.16 and for holding tanks in Wis. Adm. Code NR 213.15. These rules have general requirements, and do not have specific design details. Generally, the design requirements in COMM 83 will be acceptable to the DNR. The DNR does not have a formal application to be submitted with plans that are to be reviewed. However, it does require certain items to be submitted. These are listed in the rules noted above and are summarized in a document that can be sent on request. Information required includes the same type of information as Commerce requires along with other additional requirements, one being a letter explaining the business activities that will take place and the sources of wastewater associated with those activities. The DNR reviews plans in the order received and does not have an appointment procedure. There is no fee for DNR plan review.

Disposal of Collected Wastewater

Sanitary wastewater and septage is allowed to be landspread in accordance with regulations in NR 113 or it can be hauled to a publicly owned (municipal) wastewater treatment works. Industrial wastewater may also be

landspread provided it can be shown to have a beneficial use to the soil and the discharge is regulated by a WPDES permit. Garage floor water is not considered to have a beneficial use and, therefore, should always be taken to a municipal owned treatment facility for disposal.

For more information, contact the following:

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A website to find the Wisconsin Administrative Codes referenced above can be found at:
<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/index.html>.